Session #8

SUSTAINING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN LONG RANGE PLANNING USING A STAKEHOLDER BASED PROCESS: A CASE STUDY FROM EUGENE-SPRINGFIELD OREGON

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ABSTRACT

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act requires a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans. This level of public involvement is a challenge to sustain over the course of a typical update of a transportation system plan. To ensure a proactive and continuing public involvement process, a stakeholder centered public involvement program was selected to guide the development of the Eugene-Springfield long-range transportation plan. The stakeholder process constituted the core of the public involvement program used in the recently completed update of the Eugene-Springfield transportation system plan and was the primary method of achieving sustained public involvement.

A main objective of the stakeholder process was to involve groups representing a comprehensive cross section of the community, who have a vital interest in the outcome of the transportation planning process. Stakeholders participated in a series of three symposiums where key decisions were made at various points in the update process. A majority of stakeholders served on one of the three task forces that met for six months early n the process to identify potential strategies for use in the plan. In addition, many stakeholders served on focus committees overseeing development of an urban rail study, high speed rail terminal location analysis, development of plan goals and objectives, and land use design.

The stakeholder process was a successful tool in getting the regional transportation plan adopted. Many valuable lessons were learned. Stakeholders can be an effective public outreach tool by partnering with them to provide two-way communication with the groups they represent, with the general public and with elected officials. Elected officials and planning commissioners were confident that all interests were represented with a comprehensive stakeholder process. Discussions with elected officials focused on the contents of the plan and rather than debating the public process.

This approach provides a practical means of providing public access to a lengthy planning process to a broad cross section of interests and developing citizen groups well informed on a complex set

of issues. This paper will detail the stakeholder process used by LCOG, the results of the process, and lessons learned in the use of this process.

Introduction

In the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Universe," Douglas Adams writes of the building of a hyperspatial express route through the Earth's star system, a project which "regrettably" requires the demolition of Earth. The demolition crew has little sympathy for the people of Earth as all the plans and demolition orders have been on display for <u>fifty</u> years in the local planning department—on Alpha Centauri. Blaming the people of Earth for not bothering to take an interest in local affairs (Alpha Centauri <u>is</u> only 4 light-years away), the planet is demolished and the demolition crew continues on its way.

This story humorously relates a problem typical in most long-range transportation planning efforts—little input is received on plans and programs until they are ready to be implemented. This stems in large part from the difficulty in generating interest in longer-term, relatively technical issues. It has been difficult to provide a practical means of access for a broad cross section of the community to an often-lengthy planning process typically involving a complex set of issues.

The Eugene-Springfield area is located at the southern end of the Willamette River Valley, approximately 120 miles from Portland. The current population is just over 200,000. We are presently in the adoption phase of a transportation plan update begun in the fall of 1993. The public involvement program for our plan update draws on a range of well-known techniques. At the center of our program we established a group of stakeholders representing a wide spectrum of interest groups in the community. While this is not a new technique, it has proven to be a very effective public outreach tool, involving individuals from a variety of community groups providing two-way communication with the groups they represent, with the general public and with elected officials.

In this paper we provide an overview of the public involvement effort that has been a part of the update of our long-range transportation plan (TransPlan), focusing on the stakeholder process. We outline the design of the process, our experience in its implementation, and an evaluation of its success.

Public Involvement for the TransPlan Update

When we began to develop the work program for the update of TransPlan, we realized that we would have to put significant resources into our public involvement efforts if we were to make any of the significant changes envisioned both in federal legislation and state guidelines. We knew we would certainly have to go beyond putting the plan on display in some out of the way local planning office.

Issues related to better integrating land use and transportation, reducing reliance on the auto, meeting financial constraint, and complying with clean air standards all needed to be addressed through the development and consideration of creative alternatives — development and consideration by the community as a whole. We knew that our public involvement program would have to be proactive and provide complete information, timely public notice, full public

access to key decisions and the opportunity for early and continuing development. This was not just because it is called for in ISTEA legislation, but because of the scope and complexity of the issues requiring community input.

In the development of the plan, we acknowledged the need to provide our policy makers (MPO board members, city councilors, county board members, transit board members, and planning commissioners) with input from a wide range of sources. Typical of public policy making in general, the development of TransPlan relied on input from the following three sources:

- 1. **Public perception** of a variety of topics, including transportation issues, alternative methods for addressing those issues, and staff conclusions and recommendations. To gauge public perception we used several techniques including surveys, workshops, speakers bureaus, and newsletters;
- 2. **Technical analysis** generated by the travel forecasting model and a number of issue-specific studies conducted during the update process. The results of these planning efforts allowed staff to draw informed conclusions about the alternative strategies for addressing transportation issues; and
- 3. **Expert knowledge** obtained from staff, consultants, elected and appointed officials, stakeholders, and other contributors to the *TransPlan* update process. The primary roles of experts in this context were to interpret the meaning and relevance of technical analyses, evaluate the implications of policy alternatives, and present alternatives or make recommendations based on judgment and experience.

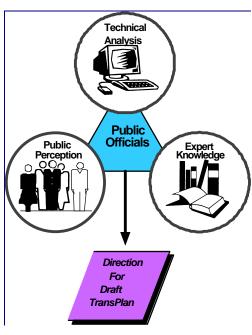
<u>Figure 1</u>, shows the relationship between these three types of input and policy makers. To best inform the policy decisions associated with TransPlan, the update process was explicitly developed to facilitate input from all three sources.

General Design of the Stakeholder Process

The stakeholder process was designed to obtain public perception as well as develop a community-based expert knowledge of the transportation plan. Objectives of the stakeholder process were to:

- Create a group of individuals well-informed on the TransPlan Update and representative of diverse groups;
- Reach consensus at various stages of planning process;
- Create an articulate group to testify to planning commissions and elected officials; and
- Create a group to convey the status of the plan to diverse interest groups and get feedback.

Figure 1: Policy-Making Decision Process



The stakeholders group was made-up of elected and appointed officials, chamber groups, modal interest groups, and citizen groups. To get a comprehensive cross-section, the size of the group was approximately 80 people. Various organized groups were invited to select a representative to participate (e.g., Chambers of Commerce, environmental groups, etc.). Elected bodies selected an individual to participate. At-large members were recruited from the community as a whole.

<u>Table 1</u> lists the organized groups and elected/appointed officials who would be invited to participate. The table provides an indication of the primary perspective of the group and the area that they represent. It was anticipated that, while invited, many of the state and federal legislators and officials would be unable to attend. Of the total, approximately 45 - 60 were expected to commit to participation in the Task Force work and other stakeholder efforts. <u>Figure 2</u> provides an illustration of the diversity of the stakeholder group.

Implementation Experience

A process was established whereby stakeholders were gathered at three key milestones in the update process. These milestone events (Symposia) were set-up to provide status reports on the update, disseminate information and establish consensus. The three milestones were:

- 1. Issues Identification and Priority;
- 2. Alternative Strategy Assessment, and
- 3. Evaluation and Selection of Preferred Plan Scenario.

In between these milestones, stakeholders were asked to participate in task forces and special committees. In addition, a speaker's bureau process was established to make presentations to the groups represented by stakeholders. To maintain contact with stakeholders during periods between the Symposia, check-in meetings were conducted and newsletters and technical reports were distributed. Figure 3 illustrates the various methods used to sustain stakeholder involvement over the course of the update process. Figure 4 provides a summary of the Stakeholder schedule for the TransPlan Update.

Symposium 1

The first symposium was conducted on November 4, 1993, with over 150 participants, including 68 stakeholders and 6 invited guests. The purposes of the symposium were to:

- Introduce stakeholders to the update process;
- Gain mutual understanding about transportation trends and issues in the Eugene-Springfield area;
- Reach consensus on the primary issues to be addressed during the update; and
- Obtain commitment from the participants to work together to achieve the objectives.

In addition to receiving written background material on transportation trends, issues and opportunities, symposium participants heard a keynote presentation from Michael Meyer, professor of civil engineering, Georgia Institute of Technology, on "The Need for a New Transportation Vision." A video on transportation trends and issues in the Eugene-Springfield region was produced and shown at the Symposium. A speaker panel of local

and state professional and elected officials gave additional details about the trends and issues in the region and state.

Task Forces

The primary commitment of time for stakeholders during the update process occurred with participation on Task Forces. At Symposium 1, stakeholders were informed of the opportunity to serve on one of three task forces. A total of 69 stakeholders volunteered to serve on the three task forces. The task forces met once or twice per month between November 1993 and June 1994.

The task forces were organized around the three categories of strategies that were used to achieve the transportation goals and objectives:

- 1. Transportation demand management (TDM) task force;
- 2. Transportation system improvements (TSI) task force; and
- 3. Land use measures (LUM) task force.

The objective of the task forces was to obtain stakeholder input on identifying and evaluating strategies and opportunities for achieving *TransPlan* update goals and objectives. While each task force had a different approach, the conceptual framework was the same:

- Which strategies work for the Eugene-Springfield Area?
- Where would be the best application of those strategies?
- How do the strategies fit together? and
- What is the best time frame in which strategies should be implemented?

Task force work included the following tasks:

- 1. Review and agree on task force objectives, desired outcomes, general work tasks and schedule, ground rules for group participation and decision making and the roles of staff teams, outside experts, task force members, chairpersons, facilitators, audience and core groups;
- 2. Identify stakeholder interests regarding transportation planning;
- 3. Review and discuss policy framework, issues, and interim goals and objectives;
- 4. Identify and discuss the range of strategies and opportunities;
- 5. Review and agree on criteria by which to evaluate strategies and opportunities, based on stakeholder interests and interim goals and objectives;
- 6. Evaluate strategies and opportunities;
- 7. Identify desired outcomes and desired citizen input from the Community Workshop;
- 8. Develop list of integrated strategies and opportunities;
- 9. Compare lists of integrated strategies and opportunities among task forces; and
- 10. Evaluate impacts of integrated strategies and opportunities on various travel modes.

A joint task force meeting conducted on June 29, 1994 concluded the task force work. At this meeting, members of all three task forces shared their recommendations for

transportation system improvements, transportation demand management strategies and land use measures.

Focus Committees

Focus committees were formed to meet the needs for in-depth analysis of transportation, land use and growth management issues and topics. Task force members (stakeholders), local staff, elected officials and appointed officials, consultants and interested parties were asked to serve on the committees. The focus committees formed included the:

- Land Use Design Team;
- Urban Rail Feasibility Committee;
- High Speed Rail Technical Advisory Committee;
- Goals and Objectives Committee; and
- Nodal Development Advisory Group.

Land Use Design Team

The Land Use Design Team met between May 1994 and June 1995. The team consisted of six stakeholders, a design professional, a University of Oregon Landscape Architecture faculty member, a professional consultant with expertise in transit-oriented development and eight jurisdictional staff members. The Design team worked with a University of Oregon Landscape Architecture design studio to develop, apply and analyze design principles for implementing the land use strategies recommended by the Land Use Measures task force. The Land Use Measures Task Force provided oversight and monitored the progress of the project.

Urban Rail Feasibility Committee

The Urban Rail Feasibility Committee met between August 1994 and June 1995. Eleven stakeholders and four jurisdictional staff members served on the committee. The committee was formed to guide consultant work on an Urban Rail System Feasibility Study. This study assessed the type of rail system that might be constructed at a conceptual level, identified when a rail system for the Eugene-Springfield area would be feasible based on cost and ridership estimates, and identified actions that could be taken during the planning period to make rail a success in the future.

High Speed Rail Technical Advisory Committee

The High Speed Rail Technical Advisory Committee met between September 1994 and September 1995. Ten stakeholders and one staff person served on the committee. The committee was formed to coordinate regional activities related to the planning and implementation of rail improvements in the Pacific Northwest High-Speed Rail Corridor. The committee also oversaw consultant work on the High-Speed Rail Southern Terminal and Maintenance Facility study.

Goals and Objectives Committee

The Goals and Objectives Committee met for a first series of meetings between January 1995 and March 1995 and for a second series between March and June 1996. The committee consisted of ten stakeholders, including the chairpersons and co-chairpersons from the three task forces, and eight jurisdiction staff. The committee reviewed and refined the *TransPlan* interim goals and objectives, taking into account the comments and suggestions from stakeholders at the first symposium.

Nodal Development Advisory Group

A nodal development advisory group was formed in the spring of 1996 and met three times. Lenders, real estate appraisers, developers along with stakeholders and local staff were recruited to serve on the advisory group. The group advised *TransPlan* update staff on the scope of work for two projects - Evaluation of redevelopment potential; and a market demand study of proposed nodal development.

Check-In Meeting 1

Check-in meetings were conducted periodically for stakeholders between the Symposia. The purpose of the meetings was to keep stakeholders involved and informed about the *TransPlan* update process. The first check-in meeting was conducted between Symposium 1 and 2 on October 18, 1994. The agenda included:

- 1. An overview of the *TransPlan* update status and schedule;
- 2. Description of exploratory plan concepts;
- 3. Status of projects on urban rail feasibility, demand management programs, and design principles for implementing land use strategies;
- 4. Review of interim goals and objectives; and
- 5. Status of system improvements and modeling.

Symposium 2

The second symposium was conducted on March 16, 1995. Thirty-five stakeholders participated. The objectives of the second symposium were to discuss the proposed types and range of alternative plan concepts for the update of *TransPlan* and to identify issues and concerns about the concepts to be addressed in their subsequent development and evaluation.

After a presentation by Portland Metro's John Fregonese on the use of plan concepts as part of that area's *Region 2040* project, the participants formed four small discussion groups to discuss *TransPlan's* proposed alternative plan concepts. Each group responded to seven questions concerning the plan concepts. Recorders captured the key points raised by the discussion groups. Consensus was reached on the best range of concepts and assemblage of strategies within the concepts.

Check-In Meetings 2 and 3

A second set of two check-in meetings was held prior to community workshops, which took place on May 22 and 23, 1996. The purpose of the meetings was to provide:

1. An overview of the TransPlan update status;

- 2. Objectives of the third symposium (August 28, 1996);
- 3. Videos on land use and transportation; and
- 4. A guided tour of the workshop displays.

All of the stakeholders were encouraged to stay for the community workshops and interact with the general public.

Symposium 3

The third and final symposium was conducted on August 28, 1996. Thirty-one stakeholders attended the symposium. Eight community members and public officials interested in observing the process were also in attendance. The main objective of this symposium was to obtain stakeholder input on the preferred draft plan direction.

A consultant was retained to provide electronic voting technology for the Symposium. This technology allowed the group to get instant feedback on a series of questions while providing that input in an anonymous way.

Two main rounds of voting took place. In Round 1, stakeholders indicated their level of support for each of six alternative plan concepts. Following this round of voting, each of the six tables of stakeholders chose a plan concept to refine in small group discussions. Stakeholder table leaders, who were oriented to the process before the symposium, facilitated the discussions. Through consensus, the small groups proposed changes to the plan concepts and identified related issues and concerns. A stakeholder from each table presented the refined plan concept and related issues to the large group.

In Round 2, stakeholders indicated their level of preference for each of the refined plan concepts. A large group discussion of the refined plan concepts followed, with the objective of developing a plan concept that most stakeholders supported. A series of voting sessions took place during the discussion, with the final outcome being a plan concept with a set of strategies and related issues.

Pre-Release Briefings on Draft TransPlan

The third set of check-in meetings was conducted in February 1998. Three stakeholder meetings were conducted with the purpose of previewing the draft *TransPlan*, providing an opportunity for questions and comments.

Challenges with the Stakeholder Process

In the course of implementing the stakeholder process we encountered several challenges. These challenges required us to adapt by adjusting schedules or drawing on additional techniques to sustain the stakeholder process.

Longer Timeline than Anticipated

The overall timeline for the plan update has taken much longer than the stakeholder process was originally designed for. As conceived, the process was to take 18-24 months. Based on that schedule, staff was directed not to replace stakeholders who might have

dropped out. In addition, analysis and evaluation at the staff level took longer than anticipated, creating extended periods between stakeholder meetings.

To this point, the process has taken 56 months. This has made it difficult to keep stakeholders interested. The longer timeline also made it difficult for stakeholders to track the transition from their input to final products in the planning process.

Staff responded to this in several ways. Drawing on advice from the Chairs of the stakeholder Task Forces, staff identified techniques to help sustain stakeholder interest including creation of a stakeholder newsletter, "Tracking TransPlan," and more intensive use of Speakers Bureaus to provide information at key points in the analysis and evaluation of alternatives.

Scheduling Events

During any period in the update process it was relatively easy to indicate the approximate date for a particular event (early fall, late spring, etc.). However, it took a major effort to schedule the specific date of an event so that attendance was maximized. This entailed multiple calls and written communication to all stakeholders.

In some cases, stakeholder process scheduling had an impact in the overall schedule of the update. For example, in mid-June 19, staff had completed analysis of alternative plan concepts. Due to the difficulty of scheduling events during the summer months, the process for stakeholder review of the plan concepts had to be postponed for $2\frac{1}{2}$ months.

Stakeholder Expectations

As stakeholders continued to participate and become more informed, some felt that their role should be more than advisory. This has caused some frustration, though more active stakeholders have been influential, both in guiding the process and in the substance of the plan.

Evaluation of the Stakeholder Process

As outlined in the discussion on design of the stakeholder process, our objectives for the stakeholder process were to:

- Create a group of individuals well-informed on the TransPlan Update and representative of diverse groups;
- Reach consensus at various stages of planning process;
- Create an articulate group to testify to planning commissions and elected officials; and
- Create a group to convey the status of the plan to diverse interest groups and get feedback.

An assessment of the stakeholder process by each of these criteria follows.

Create a Diverse Group of Well Informed Individuals

In general, we were relatively successful in the development of an informed group. Particularly in the Task Force work, stakeholders were exposed to a wide range of information and a high level of detail relative to most other public involvement efforts.

As well, the opportunity to work at a fairly detailed level with consultants and staff on focused studies contributed to the stakeholders being well informed. These study efforts provided both the opportunity for input at that level and a process which allowed for time to be taken to develop an understanding of complex materials.

It should be noted that, because we lost some stakeholders over the course of the update, we also lost some of the diversity we started with. However there was a core group of individuals who participated actively throughout the process and provided diversity.

Reach Consensus at Various Stages of Planning Process

There were three key points where we sought consensus from stakeholders:

- 1. Identification and ranking of issues;
- 2. Assessment of alternative strategies; and
- 3. Selection of the preferred plan alternative.

At the first symposium stakeholders came to agreement on the range of issues needing to be addressed, though no strong agreement was indicated on which issues were most important. At the second symposium stakeholders reached consensus on the best range of plan concepts and the best mixture of strategies to use within each plan concept. At the third symposium, stakeholders were able to reach consensus on a preferred plan concept primarily through the use of the electronic voting technology.

Create an Articulate Group

Participation on committees dealing with consultants, staff and time invested in the process resulted in stakeholders being able to articulate the issues fairly well. Though their Task Force work focused on only 1 of 3 possible areas, many of the stakeholders were able to testify in a manner that reflected an integrated perspective.

Interestingly, their testimony was not always in support of the staff or policy-maker position. For example, one stakeholder, an active participant in the process, had embraced the goals, objectives, policies and general strategies during their formation. However, she testified against the Draft Plan because it did not result in the degree of change she was seeking (increased alternative mode use, reduced reliance on the auto). While the plan is not final, this and other testimony from stakeholders has made planning commissioners seek additional actions to improve the performance of the plan.

Create A Group to Convey the Status of the Plan

It was our expectation in the design of the stakeholder process that each stakeholder would, over the course of the update process, communicate status and issues to their relevant groups. We also expected that they would receive feedback representing their group's position. However, we didn't communicate the expectation beyond the first letter to each stakeholder.

What happened in implementation varied somewhat from group to group. Some stakeholders accepted this role while others relied on TransPlan staff through the speakers' bureau to accomplish this task. One of the consequences of this was that the stakeholders who did not provide that communication link directly did not have as much buy-in to the overall process as those who were actively involved.

Conclusions

Both planning commissions and elected officials felt comfortable throughout the update knowing that the stakeholder process had actively engaged the public. Stakeholders, at the end of the 3rd Symposium, were asked to evaluate the Stakeholder process. Sixty-five percent indicated that the process had been useful in helping the region preserve and enhance its livability. Sixty-nine percent indicated that the process was useful in getting them involved and informed.

In another implementation of this process there are some things we would do differently and some issues we would try to address. To the extent possible, we would want to better estimate the overall timeline of the process, reconfiguring the Update work program so that there were fewer gaps in the stakeholder process. We would also want to better manage stakeholder expectations; first, so that their advisory role was clear, and that we expected them to play an active role in communicating back to their groups.

Implementation of the stakeholder process has required a significant commitment of time and funds from the agencies involved. It has, at times, contributed to the delays experienced in the overall plan update. The fact that the stakeholders have not always agreed with either a staff position or policy-maker position has required rethinking of those positions.

However, the benefits of the process have far outweighed the costs and possible frustrations. It has proven to be a very useful means of sustaining a connection between the planning process and a diverse cross-section of the community. Their participation in the details throughout the update allowed the group to become a well-informed and invaluable part of the development of the plan. In addition, their participation at this level has allowed staff to learn how to more effectively present materials, focus on a more refined set of issues and gauge more accurately the receptiveness of the community to a variety of strategies.

Table 1: List of Stakeholder Groups

	Stake-holders		Area					
Stakeholders Group	Invited	Primary Perspective	Represented					
American Association of Retired People	1	Elderly	Metrowide					
American Automobile Association	1	Automobile	Metrowide					
AIA, ASLA, ASCE	3	Urban Design	Metrowide					
Apartment Owners Group	1	Economic Development	Metrowide					
Building Construction / Advisory Committee	1	Economic Development	Eugene					
Center for Appropriate Transport	1	Alternative Modes	Metrowide					
Commercial Investment Division of Lane County	1	Economic Development	Metrowide					
Elected Officials / Appointed Officials								
Eugene City Council	2	Community	Eugene					
Federal Transit Administration	1	Transit/Consensus	Metrowide					
Joint Planning Commission Committee	3	Public Involvement	Metrowide					
Lane County Board of Commissioners	2	Community	Countywide					
Lane County Roads Advisory Committee	1	Transportation	Countywide					
Lane Transit District Board	2	Transit/Bus Riders	Metrowide					
Oregon Transportation Commission	1	Statewide Transportation	Statewide					
Springfield City Council	2	Community	Springfield					
State Legislators/Senators	7	Community	Statewide					
U.S. Congress	1	Community	National					
Willamalane Parks & Rec District	1	Parks/Recreation	Springfield					
Emerald Empire Railroad	1	Rail	Metrowide					
Eugene Bike Committee	1	Bicyclists	Eugene					
Eugene Chamber of Commerce	1	Economic Development	Eugene					
Eugene City Club	1	Community	Eugene					
Neighborhood reps - River Road/Santa Clara/Glenwood	3	Unincorporated Areas	Eugene					
Eugene - Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau	1	Economic Development	Metrowide					
FRESH, 1000 Friends, Audubon	3	Environment	Metrowide					
High School Student	1	Students	Metrowide					
Lane Couty Labor Council	1	Labor	Metrowide					
Lane Community College	1	LCC/Students	Metrowide					
Lane County Direction Services	1	Economic Disadvantaged	Metrowide					
Lane County Home Builders	1	Economic Development	Metrowide					
League of Women Voters of Lane County	1	Community	Metrowide					
Metro Partnership	1	Economic Development	Metrowide					
Oregon Association of Railway Passengers	1	Railway Passengers	Statewide					
Oregon Trucking Association	1	Trucking	Metrowide					
School Districts (3)	3	Education	Metrowide					
Southern Pacific Railroad	1	Rail	Metrowide					
Special Transportation Advisory Committee	1	Elderly/Disabled	Metrowide					
Springfield Bike Committee	1	Bicyclists	Springfield					
Springfield Chamber of Commerce	1	Economic Development	Springfield					
Springfield Tomorrow	1	Community	Springfield					
University of Oregon	3	Admin/Faculty/Students	Metrowide					
Road Users for Business	4	Goods Movement	Metrowide					
Youth Development Commission	1	Youth/Childcare	Metrowide					

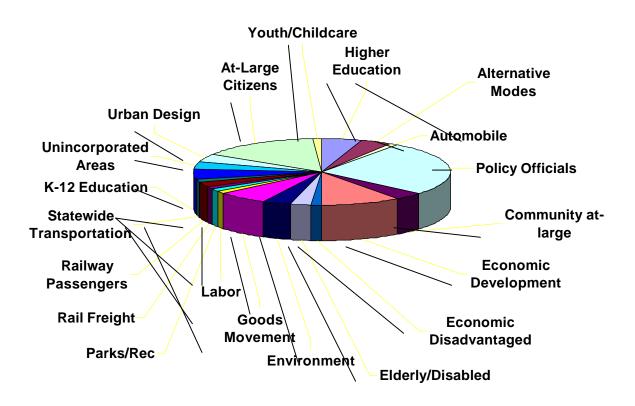


Figure 2 Diversity of Stakeholder Group

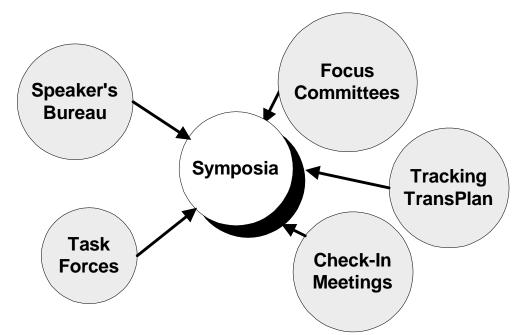


Figure 3: Techniques for Sustaining Stakeholder Involvement

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